

SIXTH EASTERN WILDLIFE DAMAGE MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE SUMMARY AND WHAT LIES AHEAD

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I want to begin by expressing appreciation to Ed Jones, Mike King, Greg Yarrow, Pete Bromley, John Heisterberg, and others on the program committee for hosting and conducting this Sixth Eastern Wildlife Damage Management Conference. I also want to express our appreciation to the exhibitors, the National Animal Damage Control Association, and The Wildlife Society (TWS) for their support. I think those of you who are still here will join me in congratulating these people, organizations, and TWS for helping ensure a successful conference. As one of the people who perceived the need for this conference in the early 1980's, I congratulate each of you as participants for your part in making this conference a continued success. In my opinion, wildlife damage management today is at a critical crossroads and I will attempt in the following discussion to share what I feel lies ahead.

Like some of you who have attended conferences, workshops, and training sessions on the subject of wildlife damage management over the past 20+ years, I am pleased at the professional progression I have been privileged to observe. I am also delighted by the apparent increase in research on non-lethal control and better assessment techniques and by the quality of the presentations and the scope of the research and management being conducted. Few of us enjoy the idea of changing the way we do business, adjusting to changing clientele or changing policy and other mandates that force us to change how we work, who we work with, and the tools and technologies we use. I would be the first one to admit that I don't necessarily like to change the way I do my work, the programs I'm involved with, or to work with people I am unfamiliar with. However, not only is change inevitable, but it is essential if we are to continue to be effective in the future as professional wildlife managers and administrators. The next few years will continue to bring change and the need for change to our attention. For example, "reinventing government" or reorganization in government agencies is likely to stimulate some changes that we may or may not agree with, but I hope we can quickly adapt at somewhere near the efficacy that white-tailed deer and coyotes have been able to adapt to changes. In fact, I am

confident, as several speakers have alluded to in their presentations, that there are some great opportunities ahead of us as well as some significant risks that must be taken.

For example, there are some great public issues education opportunities ahead if we are perceptive and have the adaptability and strength to be proactive in addressing them. Clearly, the private landowner rights versus public benefits issue, management of public land resources, increasing regulatory constraints, and human-wildlife interactions are and will continue to be, sources of conflict and controversy. These issues are ripe for professional input, and I think it is abundantly clear that if not addressed by knowledgeable professionals, they will receive attention by the animal rights groups and other special interest groups.

I mentioned yesterday during the panel discussion that the voting constituency and demographics of Congress has changed dramatically from a majority of support for agriculture in the past to a majority of concern about urban and inner-city social problems and related issues. Even the support for natural resources management has changed in recent years from a focus on renewable resource management and use to a much greater support for protectionism, "non-consumptive" recreation, and ecotourism. We must expand our audience and clientele base to reach other non-traditional, but concerned interest groups. As Helen Heinrich mentioned in her presentation yesterday, the members of garden clubs when presented with factual information about wildlife population management information, can become our allies, but not if we ignore their invitation and they are subsequently addressed by anti-management group representatives. They need factual information about wildlife management to base their decisions on, and who better can provide this than wildlife professionals.

We must become better communicators and expand our networks of clientele. Unlike some who try to justify change by condemning our predecessors and talking about all the mistakes they made, we

should justify change because of its timeliness, resources availability, and political reality. Therefore, we must be proactive in making changes to address the changing needs, clientele, and perceived needs. Clearly, there are valuable lessons to be learned from the past and we need not or should not be apologetic for what happened then. What we need to do is to perceive needs for the future and develop action plans to meet the needs individually and collectively, with both interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary management efforts.

We all have concerns about how we need to change. We cannot afford to change based on knee-jerk reactions. We must carefully assess what changes are needed and the positive and progressive steps that must be made to achieve the necessary change. Unfortunately, for most of us the changes which need to be made are both dynamic and continuing.

Some of the things I really enjoyed about this conference were the scope and diversity of the papers, the quality of the presentations and discussion, and of course it is always good to visit with respected professional colleagues and friends. I want to particularly recognize the students who presented papers for the quality of their presentations. We must utilize these types of continuing education conferences, not only to expand our knowledge, but to expand our networking capability and to address changes that need to be considered now and in the future.

There were some concerns expressed in the discussion that are somewhat discouraging to hear, such as the concern that education is not an important tool for the future of wildlife management. I am sure this was not the intent, rather that education alone is not the answer. I am also a little apprehensive that exclusivity seems to be a trend. I will state my opinion, without equivocation that "no single agency or entity should be designated as totally responsible for human-wildlife conflicts." There are obvious federal and state statutory responsibilities, e.g. for migratory birds and endangered species; and for resident species--(state fish and wildlife agencies), but even within these stringent legal parameters, there is a great and continuing need for interaction, communication, networking and cooperation with other agencies, educational institutions and the private sector. The major responsibility for wildlife management still rests with individual private landowners since most wildlife resources are dependent on private property. State and

Federal Wildlife Agencies must retain legal responsibility for managing wildlife. Educational institutions and agencies, and private landowners all have diverse responsibilities for contributing to the management of wildlife, including wildlife damage management. The key is not exclusivity, it is cooperation.

I want to focus briefly on the importance of wildlife management on private lands. Most of you are probably aware of this but it is interesting to note that nearly 71% of the forestland in the contiguous United States is owned by private landowners and private timber companies. Seventy-four percent of all wetlands, nearly all agricultural lands, and about 64% of all range and pasturelands are privately owned. There is a great interest and sense of stewardship on the part of landowners in conservation and habitat management. However, if we want to help them do this and to control wildlife conflicts when they arise, we must assist them with educational, technical, financial and operational assistance, when and where it is appropriate. To do otherwise is to shirk our responsibility to the people and to the resources. You may also be interested to know that the 1991 FWS survey reported that 54% of all hunting took place on private lands, up from 51% in 1985. Are there some opportunities for change in the way we conduct our programs and some of the audiences we need to be reaching that come to mind? I certainly hope so.

Let me close by stating that we must continue to become more professional, more proactive, more scientific, and more attuned to opportunities if we are to be major players in the future of wildlife resource management in this country. It is interesting to speculate for example "What if we had been subject to the Endangered Species Act of 1973 in 1933?" If so, both the white-tailed deer and the wild turkey would probably have been listed as endangered species. However, with support of sportsmen and conservationists for recovery and restoration, look at the status of these populations today. In fact, over a dozen of the papers presented over the past three days were on how to control deer depredation because we now have too many whitetailed deer in some areas and situations.

We must work together to assist private landowners, community decisionmakers and the public to help them better understand and support effective management of wildlife now and in the future. One

way to do this is to develop and implement better capabilities in public issues education to address human-wildlife interactions.

As human numbers continue to increase with resultant habitat losses, human-wildlife interactions will increase in both rural and urban areas. With the majority of wildlife habitat in the contiguous United States being held in private ownerships, a significant investment must be made to assist and empower these landowners to not only understand wildlife management, but to make it an essential element of their overall management objectives. Clearly, this is a difficult goal and to achieve it will require commitment and effective partnerships among many research, management, conservation, and educational agencies and organizations.

As private landowners are pressured (by taxes, a changing economy, users of the land and the resources it produces, and tradeoffs for other uses) to continue to make a profit and thus sustain their ownership, they are faced with real alternatives. They are also often confused by a rapidly changing knowledge base, increasing regulations, new terminologies, and changing public perceptions. If we expect private landowners, including those who live on the land and absentee landowners, to buy into biodiversity, ecosystem management, and other land use changes for the public good, then we must ensure their input in determining their and our future management of these resources.

Rural private landowners in the past generally perceived their role as stewards of their property with consideration for their neighbors and the community, with their and their families objectives being paramount. Today, and in the near future, they find themselves as stewards of property being viewed as part of the global environment, or at least a piece of a regional ecosystem puzzle.

The future of wildlife and fish conservation and management in rural America depends on land-use decisions of private landowners, public land managers, and policymakers at all levels. Decisions that these people make will benefit wildlife and fish only if they have the proper knowledge, incentives and assistance from wildlife professionals, agencies, and supporters. In short, Aldo Leopold's 1931 wildlife policy is still applicable today.

As a professional natural resource manager, educator, and a non-resident farm landowner, maybe I am too optimistic about learning from our past experiences and being proactive in planning our future. However, I have been pleased at the recent progress made across the wildlife profession. Based on this progress and an abiding trust in our professional colleagues and their commitment to wise resource management, I am confident that by working together we can meet the challenges of the future and proactively make the appropriate changes that need to be made in an orderly and progressive manner.